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**“We must be the change we want to see in the world”:**

**Integrating norms and identities through social interaction**

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“We must be the change we want to see in the world”:

Integrating norms and identities through social interaction

Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance. (Robert F. Kennedy)

The Occupy Movement, the Arab Spring, Kony2012 and countless instances of NIMBY (Not In My BackYard) activism suggest that new social movements continue to emerge to create socio-political change. Here we ask, to what extent can political psychology explain the origin of new movements? As we detail below, the major research streams in both political science and social psychology are best suited to explaining social change in terms of existing social movements, institutions, and identities. This has been a productive focus: social movements often arise from conflict between groups defined by class, ethnicity, language and religion, and from political institutions. However, cases where social changes begin without pre-existing political parties or pressure groups are less well understood. For example, we have an excellent choice of theories to account for industrial action by union members, but there is far less choice when it comes to explaining the processes by which workers form those unions. We propose that when people think about and then criticize existing social structures or social groups, this act of speaking out helps to create new social movements that can act to transform the original social structure. Thus people become, in the terms attributed to Mohandas K. Ghandi, ‘the change they want to see in the world’.

In focusing on the foundational moments of social movements, our analysis complements literature that explains processes after such movements have formed, including

social psychological analyses of activism and social movement development (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987); resistance (Haslam & Reicher, 2012), and of collective action participation (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). We assume that emerging social movements first recognize that some state of affairs is unsatisfactory, and that the evaluation of those circumstances creates the opportunity for reform (cf. Kitschelt, 1989; Runciman, 1966). We then argue that, although existing social groups and structures are crucial, reflection on and communication about grievances with those groups and structures have received insufficient attention as explanatory principles. As de Tocqueville put it:

It is almost never when a state of things is the most detestable that it is smashed, but when, beginning to improve, it permits men to breathe, *to reflect, to communicate their thoughts with each other*, and to gauge by what they already have the extent of their rights and their grievances. The weight, although less heavy, seems then all the more unbearable.

de Tocqueville, 1853 [Letter to Pierre Freslon, 23 September 1853 Selected Letters, p. 296, emphasis added]

We argue that the reflection and communication to which de Tocqueville referred has been underemphasized in social change research since that time. We seek to redress this imbalance here.

## **Overview**

We propose that new shared social identities develop when people are motivated to communicate their opinions and ideas about social change because they encounter a conflict between the way the world is and the way they believe the world should be (related to what Packer, 2008, termed a normative conflict). Perceptions of “the way things are” and “the way things should be” are captured by a key distinction between injunctive norms (norms about how people should behave in a given situation) and descriptive norms (norms about how

people actually do behave in a given situation; Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). We propose that the emergence of coordinated social change movements requires (a) the articulation of ideas about desired injunctive social norms that are (b) negotiated, validated and agreed upon during interaction (c) to become the basis of a new shared social identity (Table 1; Figure 1).

Through communicating their ideas about desired injunctive social norms, people can convert those ideas from subjective personal perceptions to socially validated and socially shared cognitions (Festinger, 1954). Reaching agreement about those ideas allows those injunctive norms to represent and express collective self. This consensus increases action confidence (Smith & Postmes, 2011b) and provides a solid psychological foundation for social change action (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty, & Reynolds, 1998). If no consensus is reached, either because there is silence or unresolved disagreement, individual change action is possible but genuinely coordinated efforts towards change is unlikely. This is partly because in the absence of communication it is more difficult to infer what the shared norms for social action are (Smith & Postmes, 2009, 2011a), but also in part because silence limits validation (Koudenburg, Postmes, & Gordijn, 2011).

Therefore, the processes of discussing ideas and reaching consensus can lead to the emergence of new social movements by enabling the people involved the discussions to validate each other's beliefs, and to give them the confidence to coordinate, organize and jointly act on them. To the extent that the new identity is founded upon shared injunctive norms (what we come to believe is the right thing to do), then participation in social change action (doing what we agree is right) becomes an expression of that identity (cf. Gee & McGarty, 2013). People who identify with the emerging movement are likely to work towards shifting the undesirable descriptive norm (the status quo) towards the desired injunctive norm, creating change. Thus, an injunctive norm becomes the basis of the identity

of a new collective, forming an identity-norm nexus (INN). The formation of INNs does not necessarily ensure the emergence of social movements, and certainly does not ensure social change, but it contains the potential for social change action.

In observing the connection between shared norms and social identities, we build on the normative alignment model of Thomas, McGarty and Mavor (2009) and the interactive model of identity formation (Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005; Postmes, Spears, et al., 2005). The normative alignment model provides a basis for understanding the specific psychological factors (norms about specific actions, emotions and beliefs) that need to be integrated in order to instigate and sustain pro-social collective action; and identifies communication as a crucial vehicle of integration. Similarly, the interactive model of identity formation argues that communication is a route to identity formation. We go beyond these models here by first systematically spelling out the nature of the interactive processes through which the integration of injunctive norms and identity comes about, and second, by identifying the boundary conditions for integration. First, we summarize existing approaches to social change to highlight the novel conceptual contribution of INN-formation.

### **Explaining Social Change through the Activation of Existing Group Memberships and Existing Norms**

When some grievances emerge, existing groups, political parties, or shared identities are already able to represent the opinions of the people to a sufficient degree. For example, outrage at a man-made environmental catastrophe could be responded to by Greenpeace, without the need to form a new activist group. In other cases, new social cleavages are required – with new associated identifications – to respond to those grievances (e.g., see Miragliotta, 2012). Existing theory deals very well with the former case, but is unable to fully account for the process by which latter emerge.

Let us illustrate this with an example: the collective response of citizens of the United

States (US) following September 11, 2001. This collective response can be explained in a number of different ways, all of which (reasonably) draw on existing groupings, identities and structures.

After 9/11, the citizens, government and military of the US responded as a group with a high degree of common purpose to address an external threat. This was a collective response that drew upon the existing US national identity and made salient the norms associated with that identity. These processes could be described readily in terms of realistic group conflict theory (Sherif, 1966) or the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). According to the social identity approach, when a social identity is salient, individuals will subscribe to the socially shared ingroup norms associated with that identity. In these terms, 9/11 rendered salient a national identity and thus sparked an outpouring of patriotic fervor. The joint resolution (CR 224) passed by Congress to recognize the events of 11 September called on people to “join together to defend and honor the Nation and its symbols of strength”. For 30 days, every US citizen and every community in the Nation was encouraged to display the US flag “to show the solidarity, resolve, and strength of the Nation” (CR 224). Election candidates thus tried to leverage this patriotism value in their campaigns (Strach & Sapiro, 2011). Governments and citizens were able to draw upon a shared sense of ‘us’ in coordinating a response (Skitka, Saunders, Morgan, & Wisneski, 2009).

The reaction of US citizens to 9/11 could also be explained in terms of normative focus theory (Cialdini et al., 1990), which would argue that a particular social norm (e.g., patriotism) was made focal (i.e., salient) by the attacks and therefore was able to influence behavior (Cialdini et al., 1990). Similar to the social identity explanation, the threat increased the salience of an existing norm. From both of these perspectives, social norms and identities can be viewed as pre-existing psychological entities that can be activated by individuals’

perceptions of a threat.

On the other hand, political scientists could treat events such as September 11<sup>th</sup> as crises that create a cost or grievance can that in turn create windows for institutional and policy change (Cortell & Peterson, 1999; Kitschelt, 1986). Other highly plausible lines of explanation emerge from the political sociology of social movements and especially from relative deprivation theories (e.g., Runciman, 1966), resource mobilization theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), and political-opportunity structures theory (e.g., Tarrow, 2005). Despite the vast differences between these theories, they all have in common one major assumption: that a sense of grievance arises from an understanding of the social position of existing groups (so in the preceding example, US citizens can understand their position as the targets of immoral attacks from foreign terrorists).

However, none of these theories can explain how new social groupings emerge from the existing structure to address the grievance. To fill this gap, we suggest that to react to a grievance, to contest social structure and to seize political opportunities, it is necessary for emergent political forces to validate each other and organize themselves to create a new social reality. In order to do that, potential political actors first need to speak out in dissent about their grievances. This will enable them to realize that they share their grievances with each other, and that these grievances can be used as a basis for political action (Simon and Klandermans, 2001; Thomas, McGarty & Louis, in press). They can then work towards an agreement on ways to begin to challenge the existing social order.

To illustrate how our approach can explain the emergence of new groups, consider now the formation of social movements such as the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement, and Kony 2012. These movements arose from grievances against existing social phenomena: national governments, perceived excesses of global capitalism, and alleged atrocities against children. The mobilization drew upon existing identities, yet cannot be understood adequately



in terms of existing identities and the activation of existing group norms. Is the Occupy Movement, for example, to be understood as an expression of class conflict (or of anarchist and anti-capitalist groups) or is it a new group with new norms? During the Arab Spring, the protesters in Egypt and Tunisia represented themselves as national liberation movements that served the interests of the people in opposition to national governments. Those governments portrayed the protesters as disloyal troublemakers stirred up by foreign interference (McGarty, Thomas, Lala, Smith, & Bliuc, in press). The groups that emerged could not be easily categorized into, for example, secularists and Islamists (Murphy, 2011).

We propose that these new groups were not easily represented by the pre-existing social structure because they were founded on shared ideas about reforming that structure. Those ideas about reform — when communicated and validated — became the basis for new shared social identities which in turn become the basis for new social movements. In that way, when one person speaks publicly about a grievance, this signals to others that change is desirable (providing “a tiny ripple of hope”) and that action should be taken to bring about that change (an injunctive norm). The novel mechanism that this article describes then is how grievances about the existing social structure lead to the sharing of injunctive norms and the formation of new social change identities. This stands as a counterpoint to the idea that collective action flows from adherence to the norms of existing groups that were made salient by aspects of the existing socio-structural context.

Of course, individuals’ ideas about reform can be rejected by others. So how does one idea become more successful (in terms of gathering support and followers) than another? The intergroup context will provide important drivers here. It has been argued that collective action is not only dependent upon intragroup processes, but also depends on intergroup processes. In this regard, according to the elaborated social identity model of crowd behavior (ESIM; Drury & Reicher, 2000), the identity content (including norms) of one group depends

upon ingroup members' perceptions of the actions of a relevant outgroup. A new inter-group dynamic can emerge if members of one group hold a different understanding of their social position to that held by an out-group, and if the out-group has power over ingroup members and can wield this power to enact that understanding (this was later termed collective self-objectification; Drury & Reicher, 2009). Identity and norms are conceptualized as being linked by a process of intergroup interactions.

We agree that intra- and inter-group processes are intimately connected. For example, individuals advocating confrontational action are likely to be less influential in their communications with other people when there is a powerful shared outgroup that is broadly seen as legitimate rather than illegitimate. However, there are two important omissions in ESIM. First, although a contrasting outgroup perspective (and hostile outgroup action) can be helpful for stimulating change, this is not essential for change. That is, there need not be a meaningful outgroup against which to mobilize action. A charitable social movement can form without contrasting itself from a specific outgroup. Therefore, any account of social change action must allow for outgroups to be of variable importance.

Second, the interpersonal and intragroup nature of interaction in initiating action is underemphasized in ESIM. As we explain above, structural and intergroup factors are crucially important in shaping social change action. However, prior to social change action people must speak out. We complement ESIM's account of structural and intergroup factors by considering the role of normative conflict and disputation within a community in the emergence of social movements.

The gap that we seek to fill can be seen in empirical work on ESIM. For example, Drury, Reicher and Stott (2003) provide compelling evidence that due to conflict with the police and a breakdown of a division between locals and outsiders, the collective identity of British anti-road protesters transformed and intensified into an activist identity defined by the

need to defend their local community from external depredations. However, ESIM and the account of collective resistance that goes with it do not explain the processes that occurred in advance of the collective action and the spontaneous emergence of agreed norms in the crowd. The INN-formation process would explain how opponents of the roads agreed to stage and attend a protest, or decide for example, that nonviolent direct action (as opposed to violent action or mere protest or lobbying) was an appropriate (normative) response. We explain this process below.

### **Normative Conflict: Perceived Discrepancies between Descriptive Norms and Injunctive Norms Help Propel Social Change**

Contextual triggers can create the opportunity for social change if they discredit existing groups or raise concerns about the adequacy of current policy-making processes (Cortell & Peterson, 1999). People may perceive this as a discrepancy between a group's actual behavior and their personal alternative ideal or moral standard. In other words, an individual experiences a *normative conflict* between the descriptive social norm ("we do") and their personal ideas about the injunctive social norm ("we should do"). A normative conflict is defined here as an individual's experience of a discrepancy between a descriptive norm manifesting in an existing group and his or her personal ideas about the injunctive norm. The disjunction between personal ideas about injunctive norms (in a moral sense – i.e., the ideal) and descriptive norms (what is currently the normative behavior in an existing group) creates a sense of grievance, and will motivate the individual to communicate his or her ideas about the injunctive norm. There may also be a normative conflict between personal injunctive norm and an existing group's injunctive norm. Either form of normative conflict may give rise to the communication of ideas for social reform.

Normative conflicts are likely to be associated with specific cognitions and emotional reactions that are associated with increased motivation for action. The collective action

literature suggests that people are more likely to take action where they believe that action will be efficacious and where they experience emotions that support that action (e.g., Thomas et al., 2009; van Zomeren et al., 2008). People should be more likely to advocate action that they think will be efficacious. Normative conflict is also an inherently emotional experience. When we state how things should be, we also state that the status quo is unsatisfactory. That is, we speak out about conditions that are unjust or otherwise reflect a violation of standards. Thus, a person who feels that their group has been oppressed may speak out in anger; a person who feels their community has been forgotten may feel moral outrage at the system; but someone who senses that their group has exploited another might argue for restorative gestures following feelings of guilt.

An important point is that when an individual experiences a normative conflict, he or she is likely to be motivated to speak out against the perceived discrepancy between the way the world is (descriptive norm) and the way they believe the world should be (their personal injunctive norm). Voicing this discrepancy can in turn spark interpersonal discussion about the appropriateness of particular social change actions. The need for an appropriate shared injunctive norm is a boundary condition for INN formation (see below). If people do not reach agreement on a new shared injunctive norm, then an INN cannot form.

The normative conflict model of dissent (Packer, 2008; Packer & Chasteen, 2010) argues that dissent can be the ultimate expression of group loyalty: highly identified group members can act counter-normatively when they perceive existing group norms to be against the interests of the group. While ingroup critics can reform the ingroup, we suggest that they might instead help to form new groups that develop new norms premised around their ideas for how the world should change (assuming critical ideas are validated by some, but not all, members of the existing group).

Similarly, Hornsey (2006) argues that people often criticize behavior within their

group that they find problematic. Indeed, a great deal of political communication involves arguments for change and the creation of cognitive alternatives to the status quo. Extreme examples of this include agitation propaganda that often involve pointing to disorder or disloyalty within the group. Routine political rhetoric where speakers seek support by arguing against alternatives that are presented as being inconsistent with social norms, values and interests of the listeners (see e.g., Krebs & Jackson, 2007).

While both Hornsey and Packer argue that conflict between an ideal and an existing standard can provide the impetus for intra-group dissent, here we suggest that these same processes can precipitate the formation of new groups. That is, conflicts between *what is* and *what should be* can also be the basis for novel group formation, where the act of speaking out may set in motion the processes that lead to the development of a new identity, premised upon the norms for change voiced by the dissenter(s). This process was captured in part by Sani and Reicher's work on schism (e.g., Sani & Reicher, 1998).

Sani and colleagues demonstrated that boundaries of agreement and disagreement delineate new groups within old social structures. These new groups are often based on an injunctive norm, rather than on the previous, pre-existing category membership and associated descriptive norms. New political groups can emerge in this way to fill a gap in the body politic (see Miragliotta, 2012). Similarly, in his theory of conversion behavior, Moscovici (1980) argued that social change stems from a challenge to the orthodoxy by members of radical minorities whose consistent style of behavior created uncertainty about the status quo. It seems therefore, that disagreement and discussion on descriptive norms can be the basis of the emergence of new groups from the old social structure.

As we explain in the next section, when people raise their concerns with others through social interaction, this provides the opportunity for them to resolve their uncertainty on specific issues (Festinger, 1954), and to transform their subjective experience of normative

conflict into a shared understanding of apparently objective reality (Hardin & Higgins, 1996).

### **Validation and Consensualizing Ideas about Social Change Action**

We suggest that two criteria need to be satisfied in order for new groups to form around injunctive norms. First, voiced opinions about social change action (the injunctive norm) have to be perceived to be *shared* by others (i.e., to become consensual) and second, they need to be *socially validated* (Table 1, Figure 1; cf. Festinger, 1954; Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Haslam et al., 1998). Previous research has shown that consensus functions as a source of validation (Baron et al., 1996). Social validation is defined as feedback that provides people with information about the characteristics, behaviors or beliefs that others consider desirable (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008, pp. 342-343). Ashforth and colleagues (2008) argue that this social validation may be the underlying mechanism by which people guide each other's understanding of their preferred social reality and how to act within it. Thus, this validation can influence the social behavior of the individuals who have consensualized during discussion (Smith & Postmes, 2011a, 2011b).

There is also evidence that perceptions of social validation from other people can encourage the development of identification with a new group (Smith, Amiot, Callan, Terry, & Smith, 2012; Smith, Amiot, Smith, Callan & Terry, 2013). Therefore, it seems that validating and consensual communication can both enhance attachment between individuals and increase their ability to coordinate social actions that they collectively see as desirable – i.e., the shared injunctive norm. In support of this, there is evidence that when people are asked to *consensualize* on a topic or idea (that is, reach consensus through discussion), this transforms their perceptions of a group norm (Smith & Postmes, 2009, 2011a, 2011b), and precipitates connection to novel identities which in turn provides the basis for their collective behavior. Discussion also increases awareness of a shared grievance, and this can increase political action intentions (Thomas et al., in press; cf. Simon & Klandermans, 2001). This

suggests that interaction can change collective behavior through increasing people's awareness of a shared normative conflict. Using the same basic assumptions, the ASPIRe model (Haslam, Eggers, & Reynolds, 2003) outlines the ways that a meaningful identity can be formed through a process of negotiation and reaching agreement.

Arguably, some of the best examples of the validating power of social interaction can be seen in the civil protests in North Africa in 2010 and 2011. The rapid growth of popular dissent in Tunisia and Egypt was made possible by the rapid dissemination of images of protest spread by word of mouth and through a combination of video sharing sites and satellite television networks (Howard et al., 2011, McGarty et al., in press). These images were converted into an oppositional consensus that found its expression on the streets but was supported by highly visible and attention grabbing campaigns on social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube (Howard & Hussain, 2011). Next, we consider how this process has been seen in previous research on both norm formation and identity formation, and their conjunction.

### **Forming the Identity-Norm Nexus**

Making collective decisions about actions can fundamentally change individuals' behavior (Lewin, 1953). For example, Sherif and colleagues (1961) argued that through small group interaction, a set of norms is standardized that regulates the relations and activities within the group and with non-members and outgroups. After interacting, group members tend to make different decisions than do individuals on their own. Group discussion can polarize individual group members' pre-discussion opinions and attitudes about a variety of issues to more extreme positions, in the direction in which they already tended (Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969). Theories of social cohesion (e.g., interdependence theory, Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) similarly situated emergent norms within the shared life space of multiple individuals. We suggest that as these group norms emerge, they can become integrated with a

new understanding of self-hood, or identity.

However, self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987) would explain the norm formation above quite differently. First, SCT proposes that before shared norms can become focal, identities must form through a process of metacontrast. That is, people form identities by clustering the self with similar others and separating the self from those who are different. For example, under this theory, an environmental identity would be expected to form where current goals or past experience made environmental issues accessible and where relatively similar other people acted in pro-environmental ways and relatively different people did not. The norms associated with this new social identity would then be inferred by the members on the basis of the responses that are most prototypical for the group. In other words, norm formation is a consequence of identity formation.

We suggest that group polarization is evidence of the process of the formation of a new identity-norm nexus, formed as people share and reach agreement about their personal opinions about appropriate behaviors (Table 1). Therefore, as Moscovici (1980) argued, polarization is actually an example of the process of *normalization*, or norm formation. We propose that identities can form around - and are thus *founded in* - these norms. Here, we see the tension between the two explanations of norm formation: the first, articulated by SCT, treats norms as being activated based on perceptions of context; and the second treats norms as constructed during interaction. We agree that both processes are important but the latter has been largely ignored in research on social change and collective action.

One exception is the interactive model of identity formation (IMIF), which outlines both a top-down route to identity formation through an individual's perceptions of the intergroup context (the deductive pathway) and a bottom-up route to identity formation via communication between individuals (the inductive pathway). The "inductive" pathway specifies that people can shape social identity and the content of group norms. This may



occur through observation of other group members' behavior or explicit or implicit negotiations over their understanding of social reality (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). The inductive pathway recognizes that social validation by other individuals is necessary to establish those individual perceptions as consensual social reality.

In arguing that social identities form through intragroup communication processes, our account adopts the inductive pathway of the IMIF. However, that model does not answer two critical questions: first, when will people be motivated to develop new identities through interaction by seeking to convert others to their cause? We build upon the IMIF by suggesting that people will seek to convert others when they perceive a normative conflict (Table 1). By speaking out, they can create new shared injunctive norms associated with new identities that provide the collective impetus to reduce the discrepancy between the new injunctive norm and prevailing conditions over time.

The second question raised but not answered by the IMIF is, how does inductive identity formation impact upon social change? We propose that because the new identities emerge from a normative conflict and are based upon shared injunctive norms, social change action flows from the INN-formation mechanism. There is extensive evidence that new identities that are developed through interaction and are based around shared norms are powerfully linked to social change action. Research into opinion-based identities (e.g., Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds, & Muntele, 2007) demonstrates that acting upon those ideals is a critical, defining and normative part of their identity – being and acting are co-dependent. Being a member of an opinion-based group is a powerful predictor of intentions to take socio-political action on a wide variety of different issues (Bliuc et al., 2007; Cameron & Nickerson, 2009; Gee & McGarty, 2013; Musgrove & McGarty, 2008; O'Brien & McGarty, 2009; Smith & Postmes, 2011a; Thomas & McGarty, 2009; Thomas et al., 2012).

This interactive explanation of norms and identity formation and behavioral change

harmonizes with the famous findings of Sherif and colleagues (1961) and Lewin (1953) as well as the group polarization phenomenon (Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969). It updates the SCT account of identity and norm formation: rather than social identity formation always leading to norm formation, norms can themselves be the basis for the formation of new groups.

Having described the psychological mechanics of INN-formation and reviewed empirical evidence for the link between INN-formation and social change action, we now consider some examples of recent social movements that exemplify the processes: the Occupy Movement and Kony 2012.

### **Socio-political action**

**The Occupy movement.** Members of the Occupy movement stated that they are “the 99%” gathering in protest against the actions of the “1%”: those financiers whom they held responsible for destabilizing the global economy (i.e., it is the formation of a new social movement rather than the explicit mobilization of an existing one, e.g., the ‘working classes’). The disparity in wealth between the super-rich and ‘average’ citizens combined with corporate influence on democracy presented a grievance, or normative conflict, between what people viewed ‘should be’ versus ‘actually was’. This created an opportunity structure for social change that the Occupy movement aimed to capitalize upon. The shared injunctive norm upon which members of the Occupy movement’s shared identity was based was to petition governments to change the way in which financial institutions were regulated in order to combat economic inequality, greed and corruption in the financial services.

The normative conflict was brought to prominence in September 2011 by the ‘Adbusters’ group. Their anti-consumerist publication emailed its subscribers with the action statement, ‘America needs its own Tahrir’ (Fleming, 2011). Micah White, of Adbusters, suggested this helped the movement to snowball (Schwartz, 2011). Social media and public

meetings were then crucial for advertising and recruiting members for the protest movement. The movement first protested on September 17th, 2011 in Zuccotti Park, in New York's Wall Street financial district. By October 9th, similar protest groups had formed in 82 countries around the world, with a similar growth in online presence (Berkowitz, 2011).

The Occupy Movement rapidly developed decision making processes, which became hallmarks of the movement. The public assemblies through which the Occupy movements made decisions were described as follows:

“The ‘Occupy Wall Street’ and related movements represent a resurgence of direct democracy – not really known since ancient times. [...] The advantage is that their decisions can more truly represent the will of the people, and be more satisfying to the participants than decisions made by elected leaders.” (Levinson, as quoted in Wood & Goodale, 2011)

Williams (2012) argues that the movement is inspired by and follows many of the processes of anarchism. However, due to the spontaneous growth of the movement, the Occupy Movement cannot be represented as “just anarchism” any more than it could be said to be “just” socialism or anti-globalization. Indeed, Bamyeh (2012) describes the Occupy Movement as part of a new global culture of protest that began on December 17, 2010 in Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia.

The emergent deliberative processes of the Occupy Movement are very clear instantiations of the interactive phases of INN-formation. These interactive processes may not have been successful in achieving the aims of the movement, but they were repeatedly effective in generating unified socio-political action such as marches, demonstrations and protests.

**Kony 2012.** Kony 2012 was a global campaign formed with the goal of bringing Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army leader Joseph Kony to justice. The movement followed the

circulation of a 30-minute film, produced by the non-governmental organization Invisible Children that detailed Kony's atrocities against children, especially in relation to the use of child soldiers.

The normative conflict is easy to see here. Children were being forced to serve in brutal military forces where they became perpetrators, victims and witnesses of atrocities. At the same time governments were seen to be doing nothing. The Kony 2012 movement generated enormous interest with many tens of millions of viewings of the film on video-sharing sites. The movement was intended to generate participation in collective action, specifically a Cover the Night campaign on April 20, 2012 where supporters of the campaign were encouraged to put up posters and otherwise publicize the campaign. The campaign was global, claiming to involve 204 countries and 3.6 million pledges of support <http://ctn.kony2012.com/>

The content of this campaign is intriguing. As shown on the Invisible Children website, the posters for the US side of the campaign involved the symbols of the US Democratic and Republican parties blended to form a dove of peace with the tag line "One thing we can all agree on". That is, the campaign explicitly sought to step above existing partisan identities to appeal for a united approach to address the issue. The originators of the campaign, however, took some unusual steps that affected the ability of the INN members to coordinate their action. They called for global action on April 20, 2012 but they decided not to identify specific meeting places or to facilitate the coordination of local meetings.

Despite the enormous reach of the film, participation on the day of action was extremely low. We attribute this to the mixed approach taken by Invisible Children. Although they voiced normative conflict by seeking to expose both Kony's alleged atrocities Kony and the inaction of governments, they did not facilitate social interaction between people that could cement INN-formation by giving them the opportunity to coordinate. There was no

mechanism for people to agree on plans for action. Whereas video sharing was an excellent medium for disseminating the message across a wide geographical range, it did not provide a mechanism to agree on coordinated local action. In effect, Kony 2012 was a media phenomenon but it stalled as a social movement because of the steps the originators took to limit social interaction.

Examination of the case vignettes above and the emerging body of theory and laboratory research supports the proposition that first, INN-formation is an important part of the psychological process that leads to social change, and second, reaching agreement on concrete ideas for social change action (i.e., injunctive norms) critically underpin this process. As in the Kony example, without agreement on action, INN-formation may not help produce social change. Having described these mechanisms, the evidence for them and examples of their instantiation in the real world, we now turn to the boundary conditions that moderate the effects of social interaction on social change action.

### **Boundary Conditions and Caveats**

The most important caveat here is that nothing in this paper should be taken to suggest that INN-formation takes place prior to or without reference to the existence of social structure or ideology. Existing group memberships and understandings of the structure of the society are powerful factors that are implicated in changes that are not initiated by citizens speaking out and are not well explained by our model.

Second, the collective action literature already details the social and contextual conditions through which groups are mobilized to act in hostile and pro-social ways (e.g., Thomas et al., 2009; van Zomeren et al. 2008). These moderators should also moderate the relationship between social interaction and social action because cognitions about socio-structural factors may form a basis for people to perceive normative conflict, and will thus be the focus of group discussion. Potentially, anything that interrupts the flow of processes

depicted in Figure 1 and Table 1 should effectively moderate INN formation. Below, we focus on two specific moderators.

**INNs for groups supporting and opposing change.** The first moderator is social change orientation. In order to mobilize action, INNs should be formed around a norm for changing the status quo (i.e., a new injunctive norm), rather than support for maintaining the status quo (i.e., the existing descriptive norm). Evidence of this moderator comes from two recent studies by Hartley, McGarty and Donaghue (2013) that show that identification with opinion-based groups can be a weak predictor of social change action intentions. The result is intriguing because it was found for only one side of a political conflict. Opinion-based group identification predicted political action intentions for (non-Indigenous) Australian supporters of financial compensation of Indigenous Australian but not for opponents of the compensation. In this case, the opponents of compensation were endorsing a secure status quo position as the Australian Government had decided not to pay compensation and was supported in this decision by the main opposition party. Highly identified opponents of compensation did not need to act to achieve their desired state of affairs. We suggest that INN-formation is not limited to change-oriented groups but tends to fit these groups better.

**The experience of validating and consensual interaction about social change action.** The research we reviewed above suggested that through validating social interaction, shared norms can emerge to regulate peoples' relationships and actions (cf. Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Postmes, Haslam, et al., 2005; Sherif et al., 1961). We have suggested that people will seek to engage others in social interaction if they feel aggrieved because of a discrepancy between how the world is and how they believe it should be. INN-formation is contingent on these ideas being socially validated by other individuals, which establishes individual's perceptions as shared social reality.

Evidence for this moderator comes from research in which the topic of interaction

affected the impact of interaction on social action by limiting the degree to which the interactive group could reach consensus or validate each other. For example, Smith and Postmes' (2011a; Study 2) participants were asked to engage in a discussion about either the out-group stereotype (immigrants) or the stereotype plus a plan for action "to combat any problems immigration causes". Action intentions were significantly higher after discussion of the stereotype than after discussion of the stereotype plus courses of action. Notably, there was significantly less certainty (and less validation) and more variability on action when participants were asked to discuss a concrete plan of action than when groups discussed only the outgroup stereotype. The authors concluded that there may have been difficulties in reaching a consensual plan for action because participants were unwilling to endorse the political position of taking action against a lower status out-group. Increasing the salience of sensitive political identities may have intensified disagreement within the discussion group on appropriate actions.

This specific instantiation of INN breakdown is exemplified by the dynamics in specific social movement organizations (e.g., Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, or SSCS) within the broader environmental movement. In this case, all group members agree as to the impetus for environmental action to, for example, protect the world's oceans. However, Greenpeace advocates political and diplomatic methods, while SSCS advocate the use of more controversial direct action tactics (Scarce, 2006). This disagreement of methods led to a schism between the two groups and is the subject of ongoing vitriolic interaction between members of the groups (Stuart, Thomas, Donaghue, & Russell, 2013). The key point is that where the social context creates conditions for invalidating (Smith & Postmes, 2011a) and/or schismatic social interaction (Sani & Reicher, 1998), INN formation may stall.

### **Implications and conclusions**

While existing theory is well equipped to address the emergence of collective phenomena shaped by pre-existing identities, it is our contention that these are relatively less well equipped to explain the emergence of movements such as Occupy, Kony 2012 and the events that have recently shaped the Middle East and Northern Africa. We have argued that, under specific conditions, new, shared identities premised upon norms for social change can emerge from social interaction about a perceived discrepancy between the way the world *is* and *should be*.

The evidence reviewed here demonstrates that there are occasions on which agreeing with others about appropriate social behavior delineates new, shared norms and identities. Our work therefore provides a cautionary note in relation to the application of established social categories and existing organizations. In addition, our discussion of boundary conditions provides a blueprint for the generation of testable hypotheses about the process of INN-formation. It is time for a return to the building blocks of human social behavior: social interaction. We hope to stimulate research that shows that, rather than being slaves to the social context, people are agents with the potential to collectively *be the change they want to see in the world*.



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Table 1

*The formation of an identity-norm nexus*

Stage	Process
1. An individual experiences a normative conflict	An individual perceives an unacceptable violation of his/her personal ideals by a descriptive social norm manifesting in an existing group. The individual develops ideas about the change(s) s/he wants to see in the world (personal ideas about the injunctive norm).
2. Communication of perceptions and cognitions	The individual communicates (shares and exchanges) his or her perceptions, cognitions and emotions about the normative conflict and the injunctive norm.
3. Communicating individuals develop ideas about the change(s) they want to see in the world (ideas for shared injunctive norm).	Opportunity for social validation of ideas; shared cognition; establishment of new shared reality; formation of shared injunctive norms and development of shared social identity premised on shared ideas for social change.

4.    Formation of identity-norm  
      nexus                      Those communicating individuals perceive their perceptions, cognitions and emotions are validated/shared (or not validated/shared) by each other to some extent. Communicators with shared views define themselves as members of a distinct social category (commonly self-categorize). The category is defined by the constituent individuals' shared and aligned perceptions, cognitions and emotions about the injunctive norm (identity-norm nexus; INN); Shared cognition about reality emerges.
  
  5.    Socio-political action                      Those commonly self-categorized individuals coordinate and enact appropriate ingroup action, using the INN's shared understanding about reality as a psychological platform for mobilization. The social actions stemming from the INN are criterial attributes of category membership. Certain appropriate, expected or desirable behaviors are used to define the category as different from other categories.
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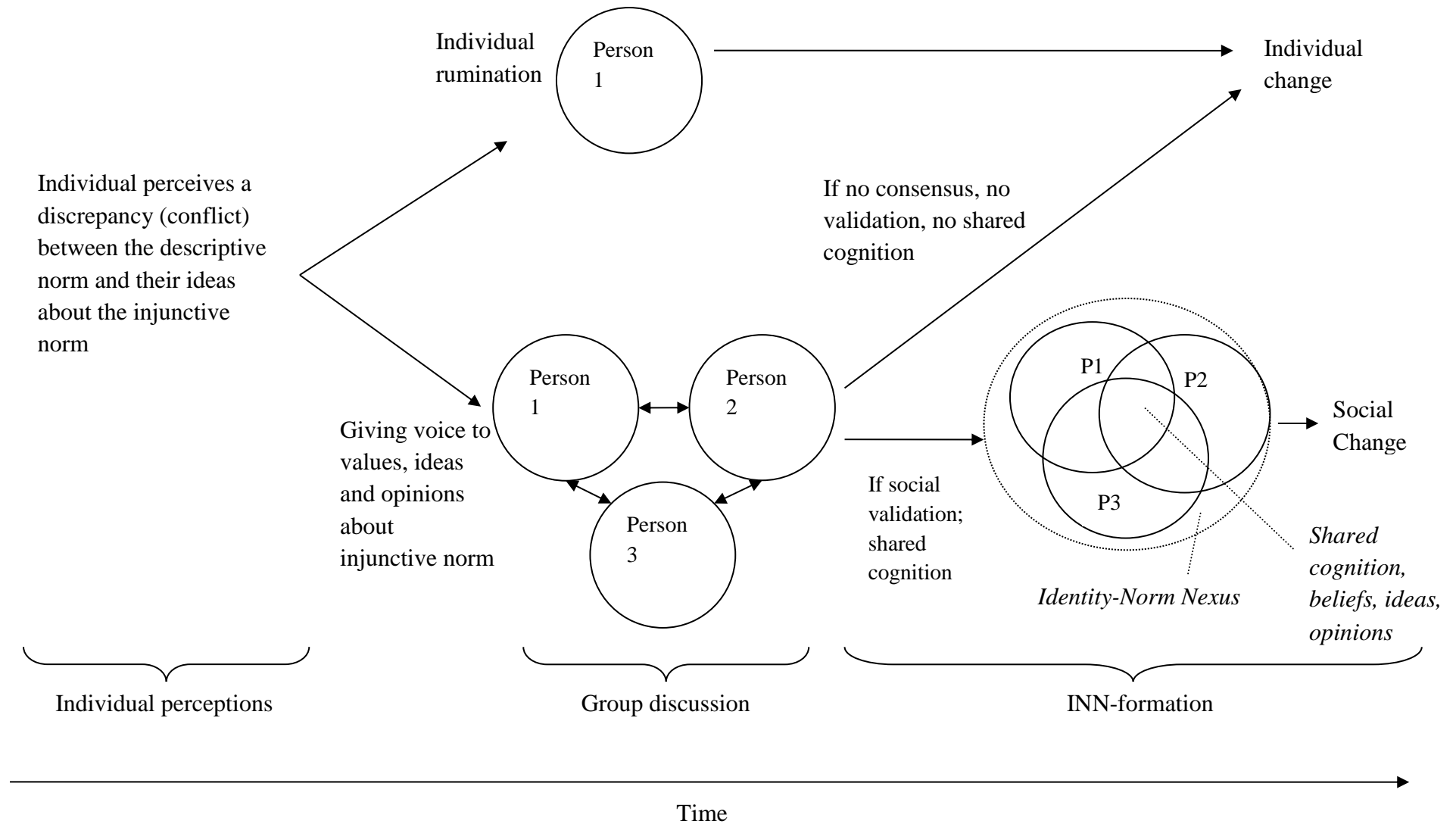


Figure 1. Communication leading to the formation of shared injunctive norms and social change